

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

Date: Thursday, November 13, 2008

Length: Approximately 55 minutes

[Interview Starts at 00:47]

Interviewer (Paul Contarino): Could you please state your name for the camera?

Father Richard LaMorte: Sure, Richard LaMorte.

Interviewer: And can you please spell that.

LaMorte: L-A capital M-O-R-T-E.

Interviewer: First question I have for you is where were you born and raised?

LaMorte: I was born in Mount Vernon, New York. I was raised in the Bronx, the northeast Bronx to be precise.

Interviewer: So what did your parents do for a living?

LaMorte: My mother just took care of me, no she; [laughs] my mother was a homemaker that was her whole life. My father worked for the telephone company, when there was only one.

Interviewer: Did you have any other [cut off by LaMorte]

LaMorte: I have a sister who is about five years younger than I and a brother who is about nine years younger than I.

Interviewer: So where did you go to school?

LaMorte: I began at P.S. 16 which was the neighborhood public school, from there I went to Mount Saint Michael High School in the northeast Bronx from there I went to Cathedral College and from there I went to Saint Joseph's Seminary.

Interviewer: So what inspired you to become a priest? Was it perhaps teachers, or some kind of religious institution you had? Or instruction while you were a child?

LaMorte: That's a good question; I ask myself that question a lot, over the years. I would say the initial inspiration was a combination of two things, first were, one or two of the Marist Brothers that I met at Mount Saint Michael, specifically brother William James, who is currently a trustee of the college as a matter of fact. What struck me was that they were males and yet religion didn't frighten them. As a matter of fact, they seemed to be pretty involved in it. Somehow that segued into my parish priest and I think that's where I wound up instead of becoming a Marist Brother becoming a priest.

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

Interviewer: What else, what other subjects have you studied beside of course [cut off by LaMorte]

LaMorte: Psychology.

Interviewer: So what type of psychology?

LaMorte: Counseling primarily, at Saint John's after I was ordained, I got a masters, a professional diploma, and was six credits away from my doctorate. When I woke up one more and said I didn't get into this business of psychology in order to teach, or to write, or to do research. I said I think I should get off the treadmill. I got into it to be better to help people that were coming to me and to be able to do so without expense to them. So I just stopped going to school.

Interviewer: So after the seminary-even though you didn't get your doctorate [cut off by LaMorte]

LaMorte: When I was ordained, my first assignment was to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in Poughkeepsie, in May of 1966.

Interviewer: How were you received back when—for your first time at Mount Carmel?

LaMorte: Ha-Ha [laughs]. I was received; I would have to say, probably with a certain degree of amazement. Because I don't think they had seen anybody that young dressed the way I was dressed, namely in a collar. So that amazed them, but I was received very well in that sense, very warmly. I have one quick story I will tell you about reception. The very first Sunday I was there I was introduced after all the masses, oh I was introduced at all the masses and after the mass I had to stand outside the church, the old church, the one which is on Mount Carmel Place which is now an office building. An Italian lady came out of the building with her I would say her twenty some odd year old daughter in tow, she would speak to the daughter in Italian, assuming that I could neither speak, nor understand Italian and the daughter would then translate, so I allowed that notion to continue I did not see a reason to interrupt it and she asked the daughter to ask me if what my name was because she didn't hear it too well in church. So I then pronounced the name the way it should be pronounced, namely LaMorte. At that point, the lady turned on her heels making the sign of the cross three times, said to her daughter, "tell him he should never work with sick people," since she had initially translated my name which means the death. That was one of my earliest recollections of my arrival at Mount Carmel, but it was a great experience. I loved Mount Carmel. I was there for seven years until 1972, roughly.

Interviewer: Do you actually have any memories of the bridge during that time-?

LaMorte: Sure.

Interviewer: Mount Carmel being right- literally under the bridge?

LaMorte: Yeah, the bridge was still actually in use at that time, not much, freights every now and again, probably more at night than any other time. One of the interesting things about that

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

bridge relative to Mount Carmel is that on Delafield Street, that bridge goes right over what was the convent; it's a building on the left side of Delafield Street if you were coming from Mount Carmel to Marist. Right after the complex of buildings on the corner there where the restaurant is. Nuns who were assigned to Mount Carmel School would get the word from the nuns that were there, that one of the most difficult things was going to be getting used to the train going over their building and a number of the nuns with whom I'm still friends can attest to that horror, or at least [laughs] getting used to it.

Interviewer: So did they ever tell any specific stories about the trains or just the fact...?

LaMorte: No other than that it was, it became an adjustment issue for them. People in the neighborhood of course remember the train as an active means of transporting troops and materiel during World War II and they would have seen it certainly much more in a period when it was very lively and active, you know and had an obvious purpose. Whereas by the time I got there, it was being used intermittently and for minor freight kinds of issues, it didn't have the kind of connections that it did years before. When it burnt, when they had the fire I was, I think I was here for my first tour, because I remember, no I take that back, I was at Holy Cross Campus in Rhinecliff, when they had the fire. When Saint Peter's rectory burnt I was here.

Interviewer: In what year did Saint Peter's burn?

LaMorte: It was, let me just think now '70,-well I was at Holy Cross from '72 to '76 and in '76 I came here. So the rectory would have burnt probably around '77 maybe '78, cause Bob Lynch was the one who called me and said, "Saint Peter's rectory is burning, you want to go look?" We did, couldn't get near it but we watched it burn, but at that point it had been abandoned, okay, it had gone through a whole series of things.

Interviewer: Even though you weren't there to witness the bridge fire, did you remember reading anything in the newspaper?

LaMorte: Oh sure. One of the biggest problems was- well there were several problems with the bridge fire. First off just getting water to it, the-a number of the outlets for water on the bridge had been turned off because the bridge wasn't in use and getting from water down below was a Herculean feat because of the height, you know. The biggest issue probably would have- that I recall being told about was the timber, what they call those?, railroad ties, burning and falling and of course there were houses below there. The original Andy and Steve's Restaurant, Andy and Steve's bar, was a local bar which has since become Andy's Restaurant, received as I recall some damage from that but also the houses in the area. I mean local folks were running out with garden hoses, you know just worrying about the stuff that was falling, but that was about it, what I remember from it. Of course then there was the big question of what was going to happen with it because it did come right through the neighborhood. It was an issue for the people even though they never used it and initially we were told in the neighborhood, that it was going to be repaired. The next thing I remember which was probably years later, was that- the next thing I remember hearing was that it would be too costly to take it down, too costly to repair it, so we're not going to talk about it. [Laughs] It was as though we're not going to look at, we're going to make believe it's not there, you know. Then came the discussions in later years, when I was back as

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

pastor, I am trying to think of the name of the guy, I could picture him, who almost single-handedly, started raising the issue of making it walkway.

Interviewer: The person's name is Bill Sepe.

LaMorte: That's it Sepe, yeah he would pursue me constantly, [laughs] relative to making public statements about it, so yeah. [People talking in the background]

Interviewer: So you've met Bill Sepe?

LaMorte: Oh yeah, several occasions.

Interviewer: Could you describe those encounters?

LaMorte: Bill-Bill was very committed to preserving the bridge and my sense of the why of that because I ask myself that question. I came to realize that after subsequent discussions with him, that he had a genuine interest in the whole notion of preservation and managed to focus at that point, on this particular item, you know. I know he was from the area and certainly if it wasn't for his doggedness, I mean I don't know the political history of it, but it seemed to me, that if it wasn't for his doggedness, it wouldn't have remained the issue that it did, cause it did remain an issue, you know until larger groups got involved in it.

Interviewer: So is Bill Sepe a member of Mount Carmel or-? [People talking in the background]

LaMorte: No, I don't recall him ever being a member of Mount Carmel, if anything he might have been, if he was Catholic, he might have been a member of Saint Peter's. Yeah.

Interviewer: So when did you arrive back at Mount Carmel?

LaMorte: You mean my second time?

Interviewer: Your second time, yes?-

LaMorte: My second time-that's all I've done in life is do things twice, am I not a great success story the first time. I went back as pastor in 19-88 because I left Marist in '85 to become pastor in Amenia, I was there for three years when I was asked to go to Mount Carmel.

Interviewer: So what was the name of the church you were at in Amenia?

LaMorte: The Immaculate Conception, it was the only Catholic Church in Amenia.

Interviewer: I remember Immaculate Conception; I used to live out there.

LaMorte: Ah-ha, the [DeCaprio], lived out there, grew up out there actually, [sirens in the background] but yeah so I did three years in Amenia and I should have been there- for typically I

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

would have been there for twelve but after three years, the diocese felt there was a need for someone who was known to come back to Mount Carmel. So they asked me if I would go and I agreed to go and I was at Mount Carmel then a second time from '85 –'88 to '99.

Interviewer: Could you describe your experience then?

LaMorte: Then? When I came back to Mount Carmel, the first thing many people thought I would do was move out of the big church around the corner which had been Saint Peter's and move the whole parish back into the little church right next to the rectory which had been Mount Carmel, because that goes back to the animosity that existed between the peoples over what took place in 1960- well it was over the period of 1965 through 1967. It was 1967 by the time we fully moved into what had been Saint Peter's Church.

Interviewer: That was because of Vatican II-from what Dr. Zuccarello had told us it was pretty much- pretty much Mount Carmel Church was founded to serve the Italian community which it did, but then after Vatican II which stressed more of a geographical element or geographical entity as opposed to an ethnic identity.

LaMorte: Okay, that's an interesting take on that. Let me give you a pastoral perspective to that. At that particular time, the mid 1960s, forget about the Second Vatican Council. Locally there were issues, many of the people-see Saint Peter's Church was the church, it was the founding church, Catholic Church in Poughkeepsie for Catholics. Typical of urban environments, ethnic churches grew up around it, like mushrooms around a tree, okay because these various ethnic groups came into the City of Poughkeepsie to work, that's how they found their way here. They didn't like come to the United States and say let's go to Poughkeepsie. So they found themselves here. Now Saint Peter's as those parishes, as those peoples coalesced, the typical routine within the church would have been, to have them establish, if there were enough of them, what they would call a national parish which Dr. Zuccarello is describing, namely a parish that was aimed at providing for this particular national group okay. So a national parish could exist within a territorial parish, it could also draw from outside a territorial parish in other words, for example, any German who could make their way to Nativity could become a parishioner of Nativity, even though they had to travel through a zillion different parishes to get there, okay. So around Saint Peter's were the Germans in Nativity, the Slovaks in Saint John's, the Poles in Saint Joseph's and the Italians at Mount Carmel all within two maybe three blocks of each other. By the mid-60s, several things were happening to those places. The Germans and the Slovaks were being absorbed primarily into the Town of the Poughkeepsie. Many, but not all of the Italians were being absorbed into the Town of Poughkeepsie but a significant portion remained right in that section of Poughkeepsie. The Poles, most of them moved out of Poughkeepsie into the town as well; however they kept coming back as did the Italians that did move out of the City of Poughkeepsie. So what do you have?, You have Mount Carmel now growing by leaps and bounds, the school was too small, the church was too small, everything was too small at the same time that's happening, Saint Peter's was losing its people to the town. So the plan was consolidate some of these churches, move parishes to where people exist and coordinate others. So Mount Carmel was then made a territorial parish and took over the territorial church. Saint Peter's was moved to the Town of Poughkeepsie up on 9G. Nativity became what is now Saint Martin DePorres. A little side note, that drove the Germans crazy

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

because they had been saving money to build a new church at the time and the diocese said there will be a new church but it will be off of Spakenkill Road. That was number one issue that they weren't happy about, the second piece they weren't happy about was when Cardinal Spellman was coming back from some meeting in Rome, Saint Martin-Martin DePorres was made a saint, p.s. the first black saint. Now this is the 60s, the people from Nativity that weren't mad because of where the church was going to be located, did get mad because of the name of the church. So there were issues there. There were issues with the Italians because they felt that their church had been taken away from them. See it's all a matter of perspective. The Irish in Saint Peter's felt that their church had been taken away from them and given to those Italians. So the poor pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at the time I went there, as a newly ordained, was stuck in the middle. The Irish hated him because they saw him as the one who took their church, the Italians hated him because he was the one who gave up their church, the Germans hated him because he became responsible for their school. So the poor guy couldn't win. So here it is now I go back as pastor in 1988, to show how deep those feelings are, people in Mount Carmel were still of a mind that they were going to go back to the original church and that I would do it because I had been there when we used the original church. For the first couple of years I was there, I said mass in the original church.

Interviewer: Do you happen to know a little bit about the early history of Mount Carmel? I know it was established in 1910.

LaMorte: Right.

Interviewer: Do you know any factors that were leading up to the establishment?

LaMorte: Sure, it was established- here is another area where people misunderstand or only had part of the picture, or see it they way they want to see it, okay. From the perspective of many of the Italians, the Irish threw them out of Saint Peter's Church, where they had been going. The reality is that the pastor of Saint Peter's, seeing the increase in this immigrant population of Italians, felt sincerely inadequate and said, "these people should have somebody who can speak Italian, who understands the Italian culture, who can provide for them." So he arranged I believe it was Monsignor Shea at the time, he arranged for an Italian priest to come in and celebrate mass for the Italians separately in the lower church. Guess how that was translated by the Italians, he threw us out of the church and put us in the basement. They saw it as a disgrace, yet it was a tremendous act of appreciation for the people and their culture. So that's how they began. From there, they gradually organized, they had a group of 24 men, I think, it's a picture of them on the front steps of the Church, the original church, who worked together with Father Realbuto(?), the founding pastor, to raise the money and to build the church. It's built in typical Italian style; go to any village in Italy, that's the style you'll see. The bell tower is separate from the church; the bell tower has the baptistery in the bottom of it, it's just typical, just looks like Italy, you know if you've ever been to Italy. It is said, I don't know who true this is that much of the brick for the church was actually gotten by the Italians, from the railroad where they worked. Now God knows whether that's true or not, sounds nice, of course one doesn't even know whether they were left over bricks, thrown away bricks, or bricks that were supposed to be used for a job [laughs] but so they built their church. A subsequent pastor, who became a bishop actually, the first It-Italian bishop in the Archdiocese of New York certainly, Bishop

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

Pernicone(?), at the time he was just pastor of the parish but he-he was very much of a mind that they needed a school because the kids, most of the kids could only speak Italian. So their parents only spoke Italian, so that's what they spoke at home. So now they got to the public school, Poughkeepsie schools and they're behind the eight ball. So he says, "these kids need a school and we've got to bring in nuns who can speak their language, so that they can transition into the American culture." So he did.

Interviewer: When was this school established by the way?

LaMorte: The school was established, I believe, I know it was about twenty-five years after the parish, so that would be around 1935, but I am not positive. Maybe it was fifteen years.

Interviewer: It was 1936.

LaMorte: Okay, we're close. Yeah that would make sense to me because I remember going to a celebration of the seventieth-fifth anniversary of the parish, and I think it was the fiftieth of the school, yes so that would make sense.

Interviewer: How did Mount Carmel serve the Italian community?, was it just... aside from- perhaps providing religious instruction but was it perhaps also political, did it have any political power?

LaMorte: In, none that I'm aware of directly, indirectly yes, in two ways. First of all for example, there was named Barone B-A-R-O-N-E (ph), he was what the Italians-American would call a padrone. He was like the big shot okay. He had some facility with English; he had enough money to make a difference, relative to them. He actually owned several buildings and one in particular, was one of the stores across the street from Mount Carmel and it is said that in the front window of one of the stores, where he had his office, he had a huge safe and this typically happens with every immigrant group. This guy was the one who cashed their checks, who lent them money, who arranged for passage on ships for them to go back home, all those kinds of things. He was also the person who allowed them to buy food and groceries and simply sign off on it and owe him. So when you say political, he was a significant political force in the Italian-American community. He was the guy who got stuff done okay, slight mafia overtone there. Later on, as time would go on, more and more of the Italians, probably the first generation here in America, began specifically to get involved in local politics and therefore have an influence, both for the parish and in relation to the larger community.

Interviewer: Did perhaps Mount Carmel play a role, in perhaps having Italians [background noise] work on the actual Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, was there any...? [People talking in the background]

LaMorte: I don't know about that. I honestly don't know that because; excuse me, [clears throat] I'm not sure, because when the Pough... the exact date of when the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge was built.

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

Interviewer: It was built- it was finished in 1888, it opened on December, 29, 1888, the first train went across. Perhaps maybe, you know maybe labor?

LaMorte: Yeah it could be that they worked it, I wonder whether, there would have been the power structure though to say that they influenced, someone influenced their working there.

Interviewer: Perhaps the padrone? [People talking in the background]

LaMorte: Yeah it could be. I mean certainly if that was going to be, it would be that kind of influence, yes, it would be that he spoke to people, who spoke to people, yeah.

Interviewer: Did Mount Carmel Church work in conjunction with the Italian Center or where they separate entities?

LaMorte: Well the interesting thing is that probably at the outset of the Italian Center and I'm not that conversant with the history of the Italian Center, but that at the outset of the Italian Center, virtually all of the membership, were members of Mount Carmel which is of course just the opposite now, now because the Italian community has spread throughout the valley, the Italian Center wouldn't mimic-there'd be members of Mount Carmel that would be members of the Italian Center but not significant. So yes, in that sense I would know that there would be that much connection, that basically the population of Mount Carmel was the population of the Italian Center, in the early years. But I don't know that-I don't know enough about the Italian Center to know whether the one was caused by the other.

[Slight Pause]

LaMorte: This is where we should sell soap or something.

Camera Man: QVC moment.

LaMorte: Yeah right, it's like let's sell something.

Interviewer: Once the church was moved in 1965 to the other location, was there like a dedication?

LaMorte: Actually when they moved around the corner that became another course of controversy. When we moved around the corner, Saint Peter's Church at that point was in significant disrepair, that's number one, number two; it was right at the cusp or at the concluding piece of the Second Vatican Council, so churches had to be altered literally. So the combination of the two resulted in the people of Mount Carmel, which they weren't happy about either having to fork out the money to renovate the church that they were told they had to move into that they didn't want to move into. So in those in those early years that I was there, that church was internally, completely renovated with a view toward how things would have to be set up as a result of the Second Vatican Council.

Interviewer: Was Mount Carmel School affected by those changes?

LaMorte: At that point and time, Mount Carmel School was exploding. So the plan was during the time of the pastor that followed the fellow who was pastor in 1966, Joseph [Rumundo], he

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

was followed by Anthony [Mestas] who also became a bishop coincidentally. The plan at that point which would have been '69 to '72 was to buy up the entire square block and knock down every building except the firehouse on the corner. The firehouse was going to be used to house the bus that the parish owned, cause they owned their own bus that would make four trips a day to the north and to the south, picking up the kids that were going to go to Mount Carmel School. So the school was so full at that point, that the plan was to build, let's see, six more classrooms, two on a floor, three floors, in the parking lot that is next to the school right now. And then in order to have a parking lot or play area, they would purchase the houses on the front and the back and knock them all down. [Background noise]

Interviewer: When did Mount Carmel School transition from just pretty much focusing on you know, Italian-Americans, did it actually open its doors to the greater community?

LaMorte: Yeah, I'd say, I mean the game plan- I mean ideal was that should begin-that should have begun to happen in the late-60s, the middle to late-60s that was the whole notion of that transitioning, okay. I think it really began to happen closer to the time that I went back as pastor. So I don't think it really started to happen significantly until the late-'70s early '80s, that you had significant numbers of non-Italians well two things, non-Italians and non-neighborhood folks moving in. See what happened was as many of the Italians who grew up in the Mount Carmel neighborhood, got older and married, they moved into the town and developed their families there. But that's what really allowed Mount Carmel, I think to survive. They all kept coming back, so second and third generation even though they were physically not in the neighborhood, saw that as the place where they worshiped. The other thing too about the parish, is that right up through my first time there, so right up through the mid-70s, it was also the social center of people's lives. I mean they would have for example, parish dances for adults on a monthly basis, they'd be packed. [People talking in background]

Interviewer: I know Mount Carmel School closed just a few years ago, how did-what was the response to the closing of the school?

LaMorte: I think on the part of some people, it was-still is a sore point okay they-and when people are angry they have all sorts of reasons for why this happened. [People talking in background] The reality is it was probably inevitable okay, because more and more and that's a problem with Catholic schools generally, is what happens is as the population of kids from the parish stopped going, you gradually say well we could take other kids then because we have space and it will also p.s. make the budget work. But before you know it that becomes an incremental disaster because in the end what happens, you're gradually filling more and more seats with non-parishioners. Then what's the next step? Well what about a non-Catholic? Well yeah sure you can come too, so now we fill the seats with non-Catholics. So by the time that school closed, they had an insignificant number of parish people and less than a majority of the total population was Catholic and on top of all that they still couldn't pay the bills. But from the view point of some of the people, it closed because of poor fiscal management or because the pastor didn't like the school. Those are the kind of reasons you get, you know but the reality is having, I mean I just know for myself, what I know about Mount Carmel but also having been pastor of three different parishes all of which had schools; I know exactly how that process works.

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

Interviewer: Have you heard of Mount Carmel's centennial celebration? cause I know Dr. Zuccarello-they just commemorated the 100th anniversary of the purchasing of the actual lot to build Mount Carmel a couple weeks ago.

LaMorte: Right, they also replicated-well replicated the first mass that was said in the basement of the church, which is ironic since now possess the church that they started in the basement. From an American point of view it's probably a great success story, though they don't necessarily view it that way. No, I am not directly involved in it other than I've been interviewed probably about a half dozen times to contribute to the oral and I guess what will also become the digital history of the parish. Other than that, I have had no direct involvement, no.

Interviewer: During your second time as being priest there, from the research I've done, they mention the celebration of these images of the Stations of the Cross. [People talking in background]

LaMorte: Yeah correct, the Stations of the Cross were original to Saint Peter's. The pastor of Saint Peter's at the time, 18-

Interviewer: I believe its Father Nilan.

LaMorte: I'm sorry? [Looks for clarification]

Interviewer: Father Nilan.

LaMorte: Yeah, but I was trying to think of the year.

Interviewer: I believe it was 1894.

LaMorte: That will work, yeah cause I would have been there in 1994 when we celebrated. When I had them had restored and put them up. He at that point, I mean every pastor along the line over the history of Saint Peter's added something to the place and usually did a renovation. Not out of whim but simply because every fifteen to twenty years you need to do something, you know if it is only repaint the place. Well he had studied in Rome and he had seen the originals that these are copies of in Rome, in the Vatican, was very taken by them he determined that the church needed, given its size, substantial Stations of the Cross otherwise they would be insignificant. So he went to Rome, researched the whole thing and had a person who was of the school of the original artist make these copies and then they were shipped to Poughkeepsie. They were so important at the time, [door closes in the background] that the Apostolic Nuncio, the papal representative to the country, came from Washington, picked up the Archbishop of New York, and they came for the dedication. They were lost for a number of years from '67 or so when Mount Carmel took over the place and that was renovated from then until I returned as pastor, they were missing. When I returned as pastor I found them and I had them restored and subsequently re-hung.

Interviewer: Where were they?

LaMorte: Well where were they? I'm not sure where they were all those years, where they were in the end, where I found them, believe it or not was in the attic of the rectory. When I was nosing around when I first went back as pastor. [Slight laugh] So it was known that they were

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Father Richard LaMorte

there but see I think the original reason for taking them out was probably that in renovating the interior of the church and in that respect sort of quotes, “was modernizing it” somebody must have made the judgment call that they didn’t fit. However, if you were to have seen what they replaced them with, it’s an embarrassment but so it was great to take down what was put up and put these back. So yes I don’t know where they were in the intervening years, whether they were in the attic the entire time because they would have been from Joe [Rumondo] on, [Juan] Mestas, [Zuccarelli], [Bastone]. There would have been three pastors in between the pastor who was there when I went in ‘66 and myself as pastor in ‘85 or ‘88.

Interviewer: What condition were they in, were they in decent-?

LaMorte: They were in pretty good condition, dust naturally; you’d expect that some drying, probably the biggest issue was some deterioration of the paint in the lower foot-and-a-half of the painting. Now mind you, each painting is probably about as high as this particular thing here, alright but maybe instead of that’s about three feet wide probably about five feet wide, okay but so when they were hung all those many years, when people would clean the church, the only part that they could possibly reach on these things was the bottom foot, foot-and-a-half. So over a hundred years, you have people whatever they used trying to clean. So the bottom half, the bottom foot- and-a-half of the painting itself in many cases was worn. So I had them restored by an art restorationist who happened to live in Highland though he worked out of Manhattan.

Interviewer: As part of the centennial celebration, how was it received, putting those images back? How was the whole reception of that, was there a rededication?

LaMorte: Oh, the people thought it was spectacular, people were amazed by it, for years people from the outside would come to view them, yeah I mean they’re spectacular, they’re just great images of those scenes in the life of Christ, you know and well done. I actually met in 1994, the year that we celebrated their hundredth anniversary with Apostolic Nuncio because I had invited him to come to do the rededication on the basis that his predecessor, the first Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, was the guy who had dedicated them. So he was sort of caught by the idea and liked it but as it worked out, I was on the phone with his secretary as late as a week before the event-no a month before the event, there was no way that they could get him in from D.C. by plane and out to Saint Louis where he had to be I think later that day to install a bishop of a diocese or something. So he never- he didn’t come, I got one of the auxiliary bishops of New York to come and actually take part in the ceremony but then subsequent to that, the Nuncio invited me to Washington to tell him about it. So when I went down, I gave him a framed eight-and-a-half by eleven. I had had four I think made, copies and one was given to him [people talking in background and doors slamming] as a commemoration, so yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add about Mount Carmel or the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge or any stories that anybody perhaps shared with you?

[Doors slams in the background]

LaMorte: I’m just trying to think now, Andy probably wouldn’t be a tremendous help to you. Although, Andy would have been-might have- let me see, the fire, Andy would have been around at the time, Andy Tkazyik, [door slams] the guy who owns Andy’s, did you ever meet him?

Interviewer: We interviewed him a couple of months ago. [People talking in background]

LaMorte: Yeah, Andy would be good because obviously he's right under it and has been for years as a kid he was there. Let's see who else in that area, I can't think of anyone else off the top of my head from that area. Who the heck lives down town that has been there all along? [Pause] Frances [Cagliostro] but she's [door slams] in her late eighties I don't know how much she'd be able to recall things for you. I can't give tremendous help for you there. [Pause] Rose McCullough, now that I think of it, Rose McCullough lives in one of the houses on Dutchess Avenue. Dutchess Avenue is the street that goes from Mount Carmel School down to Andy's Bar. Rose and her husband are the second house on the left, but they'd be in the phone book, her husband Bill wouldn't be any help, they've been there all their lives, he wouldn't be any help only because he's sort of pre-Alzheimer's but she would. She would have a sense of when it burnt, yeah. [Door slams] That's it guy. That's the best I can do.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

LaMorte: You're welcome, any time, what the heck. What are you going to do with this thing?

Interviewer: Pretty much we're going to boil it down to like the essential grains, we're going to transcribe.

[End of Interview 55:28]

Transcribed by Paul Contarino